



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

*Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations of all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration
well in progress by the year 2015*

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ASMFC & MAFMC Approve 2005 TALs for Bluefish, Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass *Assessments Show Continued Improvements to Summer Flounder & Black Sea Bass Stocks*

Baltimore, MD – The Commission and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met this week to finalize a multi-year specification setting process for summer flounder, scup and black sea bass, set total allowable landing (TAL) limits for all three species and bluefish, and establish 2005 commercial management measures for the respective fisheries.

The Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board approved Addendum XIII, allowing the use of a multi-year total allowable landings (TAL) specification process for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The Addendum complements similar action under the Council's Framework 5, approved in May 2004. Both Addendum XIII and Framework 5 enable the Board and Council to set TALs for up to three years. In the event that a multi-year TAL is implemented, formal review of updated fishery information would not occur until the final year of the TAL. This multi-year system is intended to enhance fishermen's ability to account for future landing levels in their business plans and increase administrative efficiency.

The Board and Council approved 2005 TALs for black sea bass, scup, and bluefish, as well as 2005 & 2006 TALs for summer flounder. With the summer flounder stock conditions continuing to improve and the new ability to set multi-year TALs, the Commission and Council increased the 2005 and 2006 summer flounder TALs by seven and nine percent, respectively. Black sea bass quota increased by three percent, while the scup quota remains unchanged. Bluefish fisheries will undergo a four percent reduction due to limited information on stock condition.

Below are the 2004-2006 TALs for bluefish, summer flounder, black sea bass and scup in millions of pounds.

Species	2004 TAL	2005 TAL	2006 TAL
Bluefish	31.9	30.8	NA
Summer Flounder	28.2	30.3	33.0
Black Sea Bass	8.0	8.2	NA
Scup	16.5	16.5	NA

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

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The latest stock assessment for summer flounder indicates the resource is no longer overfished but overfishing is occurring. Stock biomass increased substantially in 2003 and is 27 percent above the biomass threshold. The fishing mortality rate estimate ($F=0.29$) is slightly above the threshold of $F=0.26$. With the biomass significantly above its threshold level and fishing mortality slightly above the overfishing limit, the Board and Council endorsed the recommendation of the Summer Flounder Technical Monitoring Committee and approved a 30.3 and 33.0 million pound TAL for 2005 and 2006, respectively. Commercial minimum fish and mesh size requirements remain the same, 14-inch minimum size total length (TL) and 5.5-inch mesh size.

Black sea bass have also shown improvements. The 2004 stock assessment specifies the stock is no longer overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Board and Council increased the 2005 TAL, approving a coastwide quota of 8.2 million pounds for 2004. Commercial minimum fish size and mesh requirements remain status quo, 11-inch minimum size TL and 4.5-inch mesh throughout the net.

Scup remain not overfished, but an assessment of overfishing cannot be determined due to poor discard estimates. The Board and Council approved the Technical Monitoring Committee recommended 2005 TAL of 16.5 million pounds. Commercial minimum fish size remains unchanged from 2003 regulations, 9-inch minimum size TL. The Board and Council approved new mesh size requirements. The minimum mesh size for the scup fishery in 2005 will be 5" with a minimum length of 75 meshes from the terminus of the net. For small nets with less than 75 meshes codend the entire net will be 5". The threshold level used to trigger the new minimum mesh size is 200 lbs from May 1 to October 31.

The 2004 bluefish assessment was not approved by the peer review process. Consequently, the Board and Council reduced the overall TAL by four percent, maintaining the commercial TAL of 10.5 million pounds and the recreational bag limit of 15 fish per person, as recommended by Bluefish Technical Monitoring Committee. The Board and Council determined the current regulations are sufficient to ensure the new TAL will not be exceeded.

The Commission's actions are final and apply in state waters. The Council will be forwarding its recommendations to NOAA Fisheries for final approval. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or <tkerns@asmfc.org>.

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